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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

Letter dated 23 May 2012 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In my capacity as Chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Group in New York, I have the honour to submit to you the Ashgabat Declaration issued by the OIC International Ministerial Conference on Refugees in the Muslim World, held in Ashgabat on 11 and 12 May 2012 (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and the annex thereto were issued as a document of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 62.

(*Signed*) Byrganym **Aitimova**
Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan
to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 23 May 2012 from the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Ashgabat Declaration of the International Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Refugees in the Muslim World

1. We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations of the Member States of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), gathered in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, on 11 and 12 May 2012 at the International Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Refugees in the Muslim World.

2. We recognize that over 14 centuries ago, Islam laid down the bases for granting refuge, which is now deeply ingrained in Islamic faith, heritage and tradition.

3. We express our deep concern over the situation of refugees in the world, particularly that most of them are hosted by OIC Member States.

4. We commend the contributions of the OIC Member States in hosting refugees in their territories, which is reflected in the fact that the 57 OIC Member States host 10.7 million refugees, including 5 million Palestinian refugees (based on figures provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)). We also commend the OIC Member States' continued and steadfast commitment in providing protection to refugees, taking into account their respective national capabilities and domestic laws.

5. We note that the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol have enduring value and relevance in the twenty-first century. We also note the importance of respecting the principles and values that underlie these instruments.

6. We recognize the social and humanitarian dimensions of the problem of refugees and the need to address its root causes, and urge the international community to make efforts to prevent this problem from becoming a source of tension.

7. We value the generosity of the countries hosting large numbers of refugees and acknowledge the security, socioeconomic and environmental impact of the presence of large-scale refugee populations on these countries, and note with deep concern the declining levels of international assistance.

8. We also reaffirm the OIC resolutions concerning the Palestinian cause and the Arab-Israeli conflict, and stress the need to resolve the issue of Palestinian refugees in accordance with international law and relevant international legitimacy resolutions, particularly United Nations General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Initiative. We also reiterate that UNRWA embodies the international responsibility towards Palestinian refugees as mandated by the General Assembly. In this regard, we highly appreciate the important role assumed by UNRWA in alleviating the suffering of Palestinian refugees. We call on the international community and the OIC Member States to respond to the appeals of UNRWA and

keep up their support until the achievement of the Palestinian refugees' right to return to the homes.

9. We recall OIC resolution No. 10/38-POL on "the Aggression of the Republic of Armenia against the Republic of Azerbaijan", adopted at the thirty-eighth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers, and other relevant OIC documents. In this context, we express our deep concern over the plight of the more than 1 million Azerbaijani refugees and displaced people expelled from the occupied territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and the magnitude and severity of these humanitarian problems. We call for enabling the Azerbaijani refugees and the displaced to return to their homes in safety, honour and dignity, and reaffirm our total solidarity and our support for the efforts undertaken by the Government and people of Azerbaijan to this end. In this regard, we strongly demand the full implementation of the relevant OIC, General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

10. We remain deeply concerned that too many refugee situations in the OIC countries have become protracted and need the sustained and profound engagement of the international community and United Nations agencies to work in conjunction with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other United Nations actors, as appropriate, to resolve the refugees' plight and realize durable solutions consistent with international law and relevant General Assembly resolutions. In addition, we recognize the need to step up efforts to address the root causes of refugee situations in accordance with international law, while respecting the sovereignty of Member States.

11. We reaffirm that voluntary repatriation remains the most preferable solution to refugee situations, and call upon countries of origin, countries of asylum, UNHCR and the international community as a whole to work together to do everything possible to enable refugees to exercise their right to return to their homes. In this context, we call for political resolve to redouble international efforts to promote voluntary repatriation.

12. We welcome the positive steps and efforts taken and achieved by the Governments of some OIC countries in fulfilling their duty to promote, in a non-discriminatory manner, the voluntary return of their citizens to their countries in safety and dignity, and to provide them with assistance, support and security to ensure their sustainable reintegration. We encourage other countries of origin to take similar measures in this regard.

13. We note with deep concern the wide gap between resettlement needs and resettlement availabilities across the world, as well as the practice of selective resettlement criteria. We encourage resettlement countries to undertake the effective, flexible and non-discriminatory use of this measure, and urge UNHCR to pursue its work in close coordination with host countries and report on resettlement activities more regularly and actively.

14. We call upon the international community, in cooperation with UNHCR and other relevant international organizations, to provide more resources to support and assist States which host refugees in line with the principle of international solidarity, cooperation and burden-sharing. We also reiterate that States which are faced with a large-scale refugee influx should receive assistance from the international community in accordance with the principles of equitable burden-sharing.

15. We appreciate the valuable contribution of the OIC Member States and OIC-related financial institutions in respect of refugees and, in this regard, look forward to enhanced and timely contributions.

16. We recall OIC resolution No. 11/38-POL, adopted at the thirty-eighth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers, and other relevant OIC documents. We welcome the "Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries", developed through consultations among the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, as facilitated by UNHCR and endorsed in the joint communiqué of the conference held in Geneva on 2 and 3 May 2012. We call for the effective implementation of the Strategy, through enhanced international cooperation, to promote the voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees in safety and dignity, in order to resolve one of the largest and longest protracted refugee situations in the world. We encourage exploring the possibility of developing similar initiatives to promote voluntary repatriation in order to address other protracted refugee situations in the Muslim world.

17. We express our appreciation for the leadership shown by UNHCR and commend the Office for its ongoing efforts. We further commend the staff and implementing partners of UNHCR for the competence, professionalism and dedication with which they discharge their responsibilities. In this regard, we call upon the international community to continue providing the necessary assistance and financial support to enable UNHCR to continue fulfilling its responsibilities.

18. We express deep gratitude to the Member States hosting refugees in spite of their limited economic resources, in affirmation of their noble Islamic values. We acknowledge the donor Member States for their donations to international and regional organizations active in the field of refugees, and commend in this respect the humanitarian efforts and the sustained support extended by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the issues of refugees worldwide and in the Islamic world in particular, and to the organizations concerned with refugees. We also express our thanks to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the State of Kuwait, the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Development Bank for their financial contributions in support of the successful convening of this Conference.

19. We extend our gratitude to the Government and people of Turkmenistan for generously hosting the International Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Refugees in the Muslim World, as well as for sharing their successful experience in dealing with the issues of refugees and stateless persons in Turkmenistan.

Adopted in Ashgabat on 12 May 2012